



CONTACT: Mary Lou Thomas mlthomas@cde.ca.gov
REL#03-32 Rick Miller rdmiller@cde.ca.gov

916/319-0818
6/19/03

**CALIFORNIA STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE
MIXED ON NATIONAL READING TEST**

SACRAMENTO--The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading for California and the nation today. The reading test was administered to students in grades four, eight, and twelve during the winter of 2002. The results released today include national results for all three grades. State level results are reported only for grades four and eight.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said the results show California is on the right track, but that there is much work to be done to improve student performance. "These results are fairly consistent with what we expected," O'Connell said. "I was pleased by the gains of our fourth graders, a group that has benefited from our reform efforts such as world-class standards, class size reduction, and aligned instructional materials. On the other hand, our eighth-grade students, who have not had the full benefit of these reforms, did not score as well."

California fourth graders showed improvement in average test scores since the previous NAEP assessment in reading in 1998 and significant improvement since the 1994 reading assessment. The scores of students in all the major reporting categories increased, including white students and English learners. Hispanic, black, Asian, and economically disadvantaged students showed the largest gains in scores, with Hispanic students not identified as English learners showing a gain of 17 points. All of the fourth grade ethnic subgroups showed improvement greater than the national average, with the exception of the Asian/Pacific Islander subgroup that was two points off the national pace.

Results at the eighth-grade level were mixed, with Asian, black, and economically disadvantaged students showing improvements slightly greater than those for the nation as a whole, and the scores of white students and English learners improving slightly less than these groups improved nationally. Hispanic student scores remained unchanged from 1998 at the eighth-grade level.

more...more...

NCES cautions states against using these test scores as the basis for making broad state-by-state comparisons. This is because the population of the states varies considerably and the NAEP assessment is intended only to give an approximate estimate of the performance of all students in the state. For example, California has the largest percentage of English learners of any state at both grade four (29 percent) and grade eight (20 percent). In addition, California's results include a higher proportion of English learners than any other state in the nation (California excludes only 10 percent of English learners in grades four and eight from the test compared with the exclusion of 22 percent of grade four and 33 percent of grade eight for the nation as a whole.)

"NAEP provides some useful information, but no single test given to a small fraction of our student base can properly monitor all students' progress or provide the information necessary to make decisions on ways to improve student learning and school programs," added O'Connell. "To be meaningful for California, a test should be representative of or aligned with our curriculum and instruction, as our STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) program is aligned.

"In the end, these results confirm what we have known all along: that our reform efforts are working, but that it will take a significant amount of time and effort to reach our goals. We should use these results as a reaffirmation of both our efforts and the hard work that lies ahead. By using data gathered from multiple sources and continuing to focus on high expectations for our children, we can and will raise achievement levels for all California students."

NAEP results are posted on the Internet at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/> .

###